

Graham Reeves Ltd

for

The Isle of Man Department of Education, Sport and Culture

External Validation of the School Self-Review and Evaluation

Laxey School

Introduction

Each school on the Isle of Man is expected to conduct a School Self-Review and Evaluation (SSRE) using an approach devised by the Department of Education, Sport and Culture (DESC) in consultation with the schools. Graham Reeves Ltd has been commissioned by the Department to carry out an external validation of each school's SSRE. The validation of the Laxey SSRE included a visit to the school on Wednesday 7 November 2018. The visit was made by Howard Marshall. He worked alongside Maxim Kelly, executive headteacher, and Caroline Savin, representing the DESC's Education Improvement Service.

Context

Laxey School is situated in the village of Laxey, around eight miles north east of Douglas. It serves a mixed catchment area consisting of owner-occupied properties, local authority housing and some farms.

The school admits pupils from Reception to Year 6. There are 193 pupils on roll, organised into seven classes. 4% of pupils are on the special educational needs (SEN) register. This percentage is below the Island average. 10.7% of pupils receive free schools meals. This is below the Island average. 0.5% of pupils are learning English as an additional language. This is below the Island average.

There are 9.5 full-time equivalent teachers, including the executive headteacher, supported by one full-time equivalent nursery nurse and one and half full-time equivalent Education Support Officers.

The school was opened in 1929. It is housed in the original building, with an extension which was opened in 1999. In 2017, Laxey School joined with Dhoon School to form the Laxey/Dhoon Federation – the only federation of schools in the Isle of Man. Dhoon School is approximately 5 miles away, and through federation, both schools share an executive headteacher.

Focus of the Validation

The validation of the SSRE covered the full range of the school's judgments but focused on three specific aspects. These were

Achievement against Prior Attainment

Management

Teaching for Learning

Achievement against Prior Attainment

The school judges this aspect as 'very effective'. It was chosen for consideration in order to confirm that:

- Achievement in the Foundation Stage is 'inspirational'
- Achievement in Key Stage 1 is 'inspirational'
- Achievement in Key Stage 2 is 'very effective'
- An overwhelming majority of pupils have a well-developed love of learning
- Achievement against Prior Attainment is 'very effective' overall

Management

The school judges this aspect as 'very effective'. It was chosen for consideration in order to confirm that:

- All appropriate policies are in place and are reflected in day to day systems
- Communication systems for staff, pupils and stakeholders are a strength of the school
- The school has robust assessment systems which track pupil progress and the analysis is used to support pupils' learning
- The appraisal process for all teachers and support staff is rigorous, cohesive and effective
- Management can be judged as 'very effective' overall

Teaching for Learning

The school judges this aspect as 'very effective'. It was chosen for consideration in order to confirm that:

- The school effectively promotes a growth mindset with pupils
- All pupils are routinely given opportunities to direct their own learning
- Almost all pupils are able to talk with great clarity about their learning
- All teachers create and embed a culture of challenge, high aspirations and ambition in almost all areas of the curriculum.
- Teaching for Learning can be judged as 'very effective' overall

The Validation Activities

To check and confirm the judgments in the SSRE the validation team:

- toured the school
- observed lessons
- observed playtime and lunchtime
- looked at a number of documents
- attended an assembly
- talked with a group of teachers
- talked with a group of pupils
- talked with a group of parents

Findings

Summary

The school knows itself very well. It is in a good position to plan for further improvement.

Achievement against Prior Attainment

The school's tracking of pupil progress shows that a large majority of pupils make five or more jumps in thirteen of the areas of the Early Learning Goals. This indicates that progress in the Foundation Stage is 'very effective'. The school, in error, used the old criteria in this respect, hence, their incorrect judgment of 'inspirational'. In Key Stage 1 almost all pupils make three or more sub levels of progress in all of the core subjects with a very large majority making more than three sub levels of progress. Achievement against prior attainment is 'inspirational' in Key Stage 1. A large majority of pupils make six or more sub levels of progress over Key Stage 2 in all of the core subjects. Achievement against prior attainment is 'very effective' and very close to 'inspirational' in Key Stage 2.

From the learning walks and interviews conducted by school leaders, the outcomes reached by pupils and from our visits to classrooms and discussions with pupils it is clear that pupils acquire and apply skills, knowledge and understanding in their lessons.

As a result of the school's approach to teaching learning habits an overwhelming majority of pupils have a well-developed love of learning.

The validation team concurs with the school's judgment that Achievement Against Prior Attainment should be judged as 'very effective' overall and is close to being 'inspirational'. The school recognises that it had used the old criteria for this aspect and has quickly updated its SSRE.

Management

The school has clear systems, established routines and all appropriate policies are in place. These are embedded in the day to day running of the school.

Pupils, parents and teachers informed us that communication systems are excellent within the school. Parents were particularly positive about the use of social media to keep them informed. They were also pleased that the school has responded to their requests by providing a termly information sheet about forthcoming learning.

The school analyses the performance of every pupil and uses this information to introduce effective strategies or plan individual support where it is needed. The validation team noted that the school uses 'steps to success' very effectively with pupils to enable them to identify where they are in their learning and what they need to learn next.

The school has worked very hard to ensure that appraisal is rigorous, cohesive and effective. On the day of the validation visit the school received feedback from the DESC that their process is an exemplar of good practice.

The validation team concurs with the school's judgment that Management should be judged as 'very effective' overall.

Teaching for Learning

There is a good range of evidence to support the school's judgment in this aspect of the SSRE.

The school's focus on learning habits ensures that there is a holistic approach to 'smart' learning that includes growth mindset and the '6Rs' learning dispositions. The language of growth mindset is evident in all classrooms and pupils talked enthusiastically about how being able to 'fail well' impacted on their learning. A parent informed us that his child told him about

a 'happy mistake' she made in her learning. The language of growth mindset is ubiquitous across the school.

Teachers encourage pupils to take responsibility for, and to make decisions about their learning. We saw pupils choosing the level of their learning and being able to explain that learning is more likely to happen for them if they are in the 'stretch' zone rather than the 'comfort zone'. On the day of our visit pupils from across the school talked confidently about their learning. The school has strong evidence from pupil interviews that this is a strength of the school.

The school's learning observations and appraisal process indicate that all teachers have a very effective command of their teaching and embed a culture of challenge, high aspirations and ambition in most areas of the curriculum. The leadership team is aware of areas in need of development.

The validation team concurs with the school's judgment that Teaching for Learning should be judged as 'very effective' overall.

Other Areas Considered

As well as the three specific aspects of the SSRE on which it focused, the validation team also considered other judgments and examples set out in the SSRE. It concurs with many of these, including:

- An overwhelming majority of pupils speak very positively about their learning.
- The vast majority of pupils are positive about challenge.
- Attainment is very effective and is likely to be inspirational if the current trend continues.
- The recent federation of the two schools has caused issues for governance, which is not yet effective.
- Leadership of the school is very effective with all staff actively promoting the school values.
- Systems to gather evidence for the SSRE are robust and ensure the links to school improvement are explicit.
- The curriculum is enhanced through a variety of opportunities such as visitors to the school, trips out, after school and lunchtime clubs and residential trips for Year 5 and Year 6.
- Teachers act quickly to deal with questions regarding individual pupils and as a result relationships between the vast majority of teachers and parents are very positive.
- The vast majority of pupils understand how to keep themselves safe and are able to talk about risk assessment confidently.

In addition, the validation team is pleased to note that the school is held in very high regard by pupils, parents and staff and that behaviour is very good.

Conclusion

The SSRE is a clear document that demonstrates that the school knows itself very well. The SSRE clearly informs the school improvement plan, which would benefit from being more explicit about the intended impact on learning of some activities.

The school knows itself very well. It is in a very good position to move forward on its plans for further improvement.

Howard Marshall
November 2018